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ABSTRACT

Disaffection with the schools stems largely from a crisis of purpose. The schools' client population can be sorted into 3 main groups: the makers and the non-makers (both of whom see the schools as vehicles for attaining adequate success) and the post-makers. The post-makers take material well-being for granted and reject the traditional image of the schools as a means for achieving economic success and happiness. There are different types of disaffection: that of the non-makers who fail to make it through the schools and that of the post-makers who are dissatisfied with the schools' purposes. Schools are dominated by the makers who are likely to view non-makers as ignorant failures and post-makers as unrealistic or dangerous. The 2 latter groups, in turn, view makers as sell-outs. Disaffection and conflict in the schools is likely to continue and the post-maker group is likely to grow. Policy prescriptions are more in the nature of "don't" than "do's." It is clearly important, however, to maintain a truly pluralistic school system and, in seeking new purposes for schools, to keep in mind that it is more important that post-makers find a purpose in life than that schools find a new reason for being. "But there ought to be a connection." (JS)

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No competent and well-known authority predicted the massive disaffection from our schools which is one of the major news stories of our times. And no competent and well-known authority is incapable of producing a lengthy and convincing list of ex post explanations.

There are then, plenty of explanations of disaffection with the schools. We do not propose to add another list. Instead, we have developed a way of looking at the disaffection problem, and at the "clients" of the school system, which has proved to be very helpful in understanding them. Our analysis focuses on the purposes of education, because we view disaffection as largely a crisis of purpose.

While this seminar is explicitly concerned with post-secondary education, disaffection knows no such limits. Our analysis applies to secondary as well as post-secondary education. Disaffection is not the same as either disruption or unrest, though both almost certainly imply disaffection; one can be disaffected both quietly and alone.

Three Client Groups

Different groups use the schools for different things, but the dominant purpose of the American schools in recent decades has been for "making it." By "making it" we mean success in life--not just in economic terms, but also in terms of social legitimacy and status. In spite of our admiration of the "self-made man," in practice we expect people to use the schools to make it.

"Making it" includes upward economic and social mobility, but it is not identical with it. That is, children of the poor and disadvantaged are expected to "make it" through the schools, but so are the children of the successful. They are expected at least to go through the motions of "making it" all over again each generation, and are expected to use the schools in doing so.

Let the schools' client population (pupils and parents, primarily) be sorted into three principal groups, namely, the makers, the non-makers, and the post-makers.

The first two, the makers and non-makers, have the same set of uses of the schools and goals of education, namely, making it, in the sense discussed. They differ from one another in an important respect, however: the makers use the schools successfully, while the non-makers do not. This does not mean that the makers will all be college or even high-school graduates. It means that they see the schools as a vehicle for attaining or assuring adequate success, in their own eyes, and for whom the schools "work." The non-makers, on the other hand, either see themselves failing in the schools or see the schools failing them; that is, they accept that the schools have the function just mentioned, but the schools are not achieving this function in their case.

The Post-Makers

The third group, the post-makers, requires more discussion.

A large and growing minority of today's school-age generation have values which apparently differ radically from those of past generations, and one element in this shift has been what might be called a change in the importance of "success," in particular a decline in the significance of one's job. Attitudes towards jobs, income, and economic legitimacy

are strikingly different among generations, as between the older which has known real poverty or real insecurity, or both, and which has lived through the most catastrophic industrial collapse in American economic history, and the younger generation which has experienced not only affluence but uninterrupted affluence, i.e., security. Rejection of traditional economic definitions of life's purposes is most common, moreover, among precisely those youth whose own family backgrounds have been the most comfortable and secure.

We are not saying that it is becoming common among young people to reject material well-being. Instead, the point is that material well-being is increasingly taken for granted, and the quest for economic security has ceased to be a central task of life. Moreover, from a plateau of economic sufficiency, many young people who have not experienced want place less emphasis on earning still more and more, than do a depression-and-war-shortage scarred older generation.

Where survival itself is no longer an issue, and where economic insecurity is really unknown, then one's "job" ceases to be the centerpiece of his life. The schools, both in their educating and their certifying functions, have closely keyed their own purposes to "jobs" and "success." As the meaning of these declines in importance, so must the meaning of the schools. The minority who have rejected the traditional purposes of the schools, and who are essentially beyond making it, are the group we have called the post-makers. Though there are noteworthy exceptions, by and large they are primarily the children of successful urban and suburban families. Some express their disaffection politically, some "culturally." Their concerns, in colleges and universities, in secondary schools, and even in junior high schools, range from revamping the curriculum and authority structure, to national politics and foreign policy, from astrology to ecology, and from mysticism to music and drugs. Lest the image

conjured up by this description seems to apply to a tiny, far-out long-haired minority, let it be plain that there seem to us to be a much larger group of those young people who take for granted material security, who then reject as life's goal attaining or insuring it, who are casting about for some other sense of purpose in life--and who therefore reject the purposes of the makers.

Types of Disaffection

We believe it is useful to distinguish among different types of disaffection.

First there is the disaffection of non-makers, who accept that they are expected to make it through the schools, and who fail to do so. Without examining why they are non-makers (a crucial question), it should hardly be surprising if they are frustrated, resentful, and angry at themselves, or at the schools, or at those who demand that they make it, or some combination of these.

Quite different is the disaffection of the post-makers, whose dissatisfaction with the schools is even less focused than that of the preceding group. Some will be merely bored by school--not because it is too easy, or too slow, but because what it is about does not interest them. Some will press for educational "relevance," a term open to a variety of interpretations. Some will seek alternatives to the regular school system. Some will dedicate themselves to political (including "revolutionary") purposes. These possibilities are derived from observation; there is no a priori way of knowing what fills a purpose-vacuum.

In spite of their differences, whether they are non-makers concentrated in urban areas, and mainly blacks and other racial

minorities, or whether they are post-makers concentrated in suburban areas, and mainly affluent whites, both groups of disaffected often employ a common rhetoric. Since this is so, since their most politicized and articulate members view themselves as being in some kind of alliance, and since they are all, in any case, young people in a day of "youth culture" and "generation gap," it is easy to think of the disaffected as being one group, with a common set of attitudes and causes, and a common future. To do so would be a mistake.

Disaffection and Conflict

Disaffection and conflict are not the same. One can be disaffected all by himself. But when groups with conflicting values and purposes are brought together in large groups, and when one or more groups is disaffected, then conflict, and occasionally violence, is a predictable consequence.

It is no exaggeration to say that our schools are dominated by makers. They are the most numerous group among the client population. Even though in the post-secondary area, among the students though not the parents, the number of post-makers is rapidly catching up with that of makers, it is still true that faculty, administrators, superintendents, regents and other lay boards, and elected public officials are virtually without exception drawn from the maker group.

This group of makers is liable to view non-makers as trouble-making failures, whose disaffection and academic failures are viewed as separate and mutually reinforcing. And they are likely to view post-makers as incomprehensible, unappreciative, and unrealistic, and occasionally as products of excessive permissiveness, as dangerously radical, as self-indulgent hedonists, or just as "campus bums."

The disaffected groups will have equally unpleasant notions of the dominant maker group, viewing them as racist and manipulative, or at best crass sell-outs. It will be easy to develop political, class, and/or racial arguments against that dominant group, and these arguments can easily be vested with moralistic connotations.

The Future of Disaffection

There is great interest in the question of whether disaffection and conflict in the schools will subside or continue, and if they are to continue whether they will take familiar or entirely new forms. Our analysis suggests that they will continue, but that they will take somewhat different forms. We will discuss the future we see, under headings corresponding to the three client groups discussed earlier.

Non-makers. Conflict and disaffection associated with non-makers will continue for a decade and beyond.

One reason is the problem of motivation. If for racial, economic, and/or institutional reasons, members of the non-maker group cannot in fact "make it" in vocations no matter how well they do in school, or if it appears to them that they cannot, then there is little that can be done in the schools to make makers out of them.

Another problem is the tendency of advantaged groups in American society to take over for themselves promising special programs intended as compensatory, remedial efforts for non-makers. Unless remedial programs can be devised which are at the same time effective and acceptable to non-makers and in some way unavailable and/or unattractive to the remainder of society, it is difficult to employ the school system or extra-school-system programs to make makers out of non-makers.

Makers. Many of the parents who have urged their children to work hard, stay with it, and "get an education" by finishing secondary school, will soon begin to find that those with only a secondary school diploma are not socially regarded as having an education. Employers who today use the high school diploma (together with one's arrest record and other "objective data") as job-rationing devices and as proxies for desired traits will by then find that the high-school diploma, since virtually everyone has one, neither rations jobs nor is a proxy for any distinguishing trait.

The important implication is that even if the schools do their job thoroughly and effectively, and educate everyone through the twelfth grade (or any other level), it may be impossible for everyone to be a maker. The definition of "maker" may change.

Post-makers. There are many scenarios involving post-makers. The relative and absolute size of the post-maker group will grow, and this growth has potentially powerful consequences, not only for the subject matter of this paper, but for the continued existence of the schools, their curricula, and their authority structures.

Post-makers are already and dominant group among undergraduates at a few colleges and universities. As time passes, they will become the dominant group at others. The progression will probably run from the most elite private, and in a few cases, public colleges and universities, to the most academically prestigious state universities, to the state colleges, and finally to the two-year community colleges. A similar progression will run through secondary schools, with post-makers becoming dominant in the student body of increasing numbers of private and suburban public high schools. While these developments set up the familiar conflict between the student on the one hand and the faculty, administration, parents and community on the other, the conflict is

complicated by two other possibilities. First, the growth of the post-maker group will mean that in some suburban school districts and private universities, the post-maker group may soon become dominant not only among students, but also among faculty, administration, and even parents. At the other extreme is the possibility that post-makers may come to see their life's purpose as being achieved wholly outside of and independently of the schools.

Speculating on the consequences of these developments is hazardous. For one thing, our expression, "post-maker," reveals that we only know what the group is not, what phase it has passed, and not what it is; like "post-industrial," "post-capitalist," and "post-Christian" (or like "non-white," "non-poor," or "non-violent"), it is a term revealing more ignorance than understanding. To say that increasing numbers of participants in the school system will demand that schools serve some purpose other than "making it" does not suggest what that purpose will be; it does not even suggest that there actually is an alternative purpose to be found.

To assume that schools will turn to teaching people who want to learn for the sake of learning would be, we think, naive. A few people may accept such a purpose, but the majority will not. And such a statement does not provide a unique curriculum. What shall we learn, for the sake of learning it?

Implied Policies

The policy prescriptions arising out of this analysis are more in the nature of "don't's" than "do's." This reflects a need to be sensitive to the dangers inherent in the situation, inspite of the difficulties in forecasting.

(1) There are dangers inherent in a policy of forcing post-makers to act out the maker role. This is one current reaction; its results are disaffection and alienation.

(2) As post-makers cast about for new life purposes, there are dangers in school authorities following each student whim as if it were a new definition of existence. While older people may think they are liberal or modern if they side with students in every issue, actually this is not too helpful to those who desperately need guidance.

(3) If colleges, universities and secondary schools, whether public or private but particularly public, are dominated by and essentially controlled by post-makers, there is the danger that they will come under far greater criticism by newspaper editors, political figures, community groups, and parents than is now the case. There is much greater potential for mutual alienation and polarization in our scenario than even in the present polarized world. The independence of schools may be threatened by legislative bodies at all levels of government. It is hard to imagine passing through the next decade without disruption, conflict and violence, and with no loss of academic freedom.

(4) There is the danger that as post-makers come to dominate more and more colleges and local school districts, and as the purposes of the schools change, making the schools more "relevant" to post-makers may make them irrelevant to non-makers. Some of the changes proposed by school reformers, to make them more open, free, and interesting, derive from the needs of post-makers and conflict with the needs of the disadvantaged.

Concluding Comments

My two concluding comments sound more like those of a sermon than of policy analysis. If that is so, it is because that is what seems called for.

First, it is clearly important to maintain a variety of types of educational experience, and that it is equally important that attention be given to the standing and reputation of each type. A truly pluralistic school system, with tolerance as well as variety, is the type most likely to minimize disaffection and conflict.

And second, it is possible, in seeking new purposes for the schools, that (1) no alternative purpose can be found at all; or (2) no alternative purpose can be agreed upon; or (3) the new, agreed-upon purpose is one which the schools are incapable of fulfilling. In all this, we should remember that it is more important that post-makers find a purpose in life than that schools find a new reason for being. But there ought to be a connection.